

Teaming occurs when two or more people are brought together to work on a task on behalf of the church. While one person may be able to do the task, the experience, abilities, knowledge and time of more than one increase the potential for having the task done well. Teaming may offer a setting in which people feel support, develop confidence or have time to do a task that they would hesitate to undertake alone. It also helps to build community in the church.

History and Background

Having two or three people work together on a task is not unusual or new in the life of the church. There are many illustrations in the Bible of teaming. Jesus asked two of the disciples to find and prepare a room in which the last supper would take place (Mark 14:13-14). Leaders of the early church in Antioch were moved by the Holy Spirit to set Paul and Barnabas apart to do "the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2).

When Paul in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 developed the idea of the church as the body of Christ, he made the point that the faithfulness and effectiveness of the church depend on all its members working together, each contributing what he or she has to offer to the common ministry and mission. Team leadership is a natural result of this

theological understanding of the church. It recognizes that two or three people often produce more effective work than one person or a large committee.

Common Practices

You can probably think of examples of teaming in your church. Many churches have more than one pastor who team to provide pastoral service. The governing board asks three people to plan a retreat for officers. Two people team teach the adult church school class. Stewardship visitation is done in pairs. Teams last as long as the task: all year for church school teachers, or until the mission fest is held for its planners.

In a sense all work done by a committee is based on principles of teaming, but committees and boards sometimes appoint teams specifically for one task. Teams are more effective when talents are matched to a specific need.

People work on specific projects, tasks, programs or events as teams. Whether teams develop training programs for hospital visitors or plan the Christmas program, they are accountable to the group that gives them the task. If two or three people find a task they think needs to be done, before they form a team to do it, it helps to check out their perceptions to be sure it is the time to work on the project.

The way people work together in teams varies. Some teams agree to

meet, take individual assignments and then occasionally check in with one another. Other teams meet regularly, plan each step together and cooperate in carrying them out.

Principles of Teaming

Working in teams is not the same as working alone. There are things to consider in choosing teams, beginning teams and working in teams. Understanding these principles will help you as you team.

Selecting and Assigning Teams

The following questions will help you make a selection:

- Is a team the best way to get the task done? Perhaps it can be done more easily by one person or by a group of people. The task should be big enough for the team members each to feel it deserves her or his time and effort. Determine the number of people to be on the team based on the requirements of the task.
- Who should be on the team? Decide the kinds of experience, knowledge and abilities that are needed and the amount of time necessary. Think about whether it needs people who have ideas or people who can pay attention to detail and get tasks done on time. Find out who has an interest in the task, cares about it or wants something to happen as a result of its being accomplished.
- Is the task clear? A clear task should let the team know what is expected of them and what the results will be so that they can know when it is adequately completed. The task should also clearly relate to the mission of the church.
- What authority does the team have? Teams may have the authority to plan, to carry out the plan and to spend a certain amount of money without checking with anyone. Sometimes the team is to report to the group that assigned it the task after the planning is complete or before spending money or at some other point for authorization to move further.
- What resources are available? Resources include budget, help from the pastor or other staff, support from the church office and access to help from other people.
- What is the time frame of the work? How long is the commitment to work together? If there are deadlines for completion or checkpoints along the way, these need to be scheduled.

Beginning a Team

How teams begin is a crucial factor in the effectiveness of teaming and the satisfaction derived from it. At the first meeting of the team, the team members should explore the following issues:

- **The task.** The task should be clear, important to the church and related to the church's mission. The expectations about results should also be clear. Is the team to plan a mission fest, publicize a mission fest, etc.?
 - **Reasons for being on the team.** Discuss why each agreed to be on the team, the interests each brings and personal agenda.
 - **Expectations of one another.** Discuss how you will work together. Schedule meetings and divide tasks and responsibilities.
 - **Strengths and weaknesses.** Discover experience, background, knowledge and abilities of each member of the team so that you can best use expertise. Teaming allows for one person's strengths to be used when another has a particular weakness.
 - **Decision-making.** Discuss how, when and by whom decisions will be made. Perhaps decisions will be made only by consensus when the team is together. Individuals may be given authority for some decisions to be made between meetings. Under what circumstances will this happen?
 - **Possibilities for working on the task.** Talk about as many ways of doing the task as you can. Discuss the processes you could follow as well as possible outcomes.
 - **Resources.** Make sure you are in agreement about the resources that are available so that you don't overlook any.
 - **Reporting to those to whom you are accountable.** Know when reports are expected or set a schedule for yourselves. Decide who will prepare the reports and whether everyone will know the contents before the report is made.
 - **Accountability to one another.** Decide how you will check in with one another and give one another feedback. Determine procedures for what happens if someone doesn't follow through or is delayed.
- Once these factors have been determined, it is time to plan your work. A simple planning guide is to determine:
- **Goals.** What do you want to achieve?
 - **Strategies.** What are the ways you will work to achieve the goals?
 - **Timeline.** When does each thing have to be done and in what sequence?
 - **Resources.** What resources are needed and how will they be secured?
 - **Assignments.** Who will do what?
 - **Follow through.** How will you check in with one another, keep the work on track and evaluate how effectively you are doing what you said you would do?
 - **Evaluation and reporting.** How will you evaluate your work when it is complete? How will you report to the group that assigned you the task?

Working as a Team

Even with good preliminary work, there are times when the team should again discuss how they are working. Such times include:

- If individual assignments are not being done or not being done on time.
- If the team is missing deadlines it set for itself.
- If team members seem to be losing enthusiasm for or interest in the task.
- If the plan you agreed on doesn't seem to be working or if people aren't responding as you anticipated.

Skills and Attributes Needed

- Understanding of how groups function.
- Tolerance for ambiguity as the team forms.
- Ability to communicate clearly.
- Ability to listen and help others communicate their ideas.
- Understanding of how decisions are made in a group.
- Understanding of how a planning process works.

Build teams, carefully mixing and matching the kinds of skills and gifts that will contribute to the task and help the team function well together. For example, some people are better dreamers than others. Some are good at detail work and follow through on

time. Some procrastinate and miss deadlines. While some like to see results quickly, others are more inclined to pace their work over a long assignment. It helps to know these individual traits when selecting people for a leadership team and in understanding differences as you work with others on a team.

Ways to Increase Skills, Knowledge and Effectiveness

- **As teams form, they go through a process** which usually includes some disagreement. Learn about group process from a resource such as **“Leading Small Groups: Basic Skills for Church and Community Organizations,”** by Nathan W. Turner, Judson Press, 1996.
- Learn about Team Leadership in industry or other organizations through seminars, articles or books. Examine which principles are the same in church life, and how they differ.

Questions

- What is a team and how does it differ from a committee or task force?
- What are the advantages of teaming?
- What do you think is most important to keep in mind in selecting people for teams?

- What are the most crucial issues for team members to discuss at the beginning of their experience?
- Who is responsible for effective teaming, those who called the team together or the members of the team?
- What do you think Liz should do?
- What could have been done at the beginning of the teaming experience to prevent this situation?

Action Suggestions

Read each of the following descriptions of experiences with teams and discuss the questions.

1. Dave and Raoul are asked by the church school superintendent to team teach the seventh-grade class.

They are given some curriculum materials and the names of the students they will have. Raoul begins to feel uneasy because it seems that Dave increasingly wants him to do all the teaching when Raoul thought they would share equally.

- What should Raoul do?
 - What could have been done at the beginning of the teaming experience to prevent this situation?
 - What responsibility does the church school superintendent have in this situation?
2. Liz and Andy have been asked to help the church organize an effort to minister to the needs of new immigrants in the community. They are to report to the governing board on January 20. It is now January 15 and nothing has happened. Liz telephones Andy but learns he is out of town for a few days.